

Battle Creek War 1859



Utah's past is full of haunted tales, but one of the oldest and scariest is the story of the Ute tribal leader, Old Bishop, who was murdered by Mormon Battalion veterans on the Provo River in late 1849 or early 1850. According to legend, they disemboweled Old Bishop and filled his body with stones to sink him in the river to hide their crime. The trick didn't work, and when the Utes found the body, it touched off one the territory's bloodiest Indian

Trouble between the Utes and their new Utah Valley neighbors had been brewing for some time. The Mormon militia killed four Utes in a fight at Battle Creek, now Pleasant Grove, in March 1849, the same month settlers founded Provo on the site of a traditional Ute fishing camp. According to the Mormon church's *Journal History*, the pot began to boil when Jerome Zabriskie, Richard A. Ivie and John Rufus Stoddard left Fort Utah "professedly to hunt cattle." They met Old Bishop, so named "on account of his appearance and gestures which somewhat resembled" the recently deceased presiding bishop, Newel K. Whitney.

Old Bishop was wearing a shirt he allegedly had stolen from Ivie, and the trio put a bullet in the Ute leader's head trying to reclaim it. The killers dragged the corpse to a backwater of the Provo River and tried to sink it near Box



Settler Thomas Orr Jr. recalled a different story. Brigham Young had made a treaty with the Utes, Orr wrote, agreeing the tribe wouldn't molest the settlers' cattle if the Mormons wouldn't kill the wild game their neighbors "depended on for a living." After a four-inch snowfall, Stoddard and Zabriskie went deer hunting—more accurately, poaching. Old Bishop caught them and knew these whites were hunting deer in violation of the treaty.

In the resulting scuffle, Stoddard fired first and the tribal leader dropped dead. His body was hidden in a nearby creek. After pulling the body to the bank, states Orr, "one of the men stuck a knife into his belly and ripped him open so that his body would sink and efface all evidence of the crime." Instead of sinking, Old Bishop's body floated downstream and caught on a cottonwood root. While Zabriskie and Stoddard boasted of the murder at the fort, Utes found the body.

The battle at Fort Utah was the first major operation of the Nauvoo Legion, Utah's territorial militia. General Daniel Wells issued orders to take no prisoners and "let none escape but do the work up clean." In a brutal fight and pursuit, stalwarts like Lot Smith, Bill Hickman, Ephraim Hanks and Robert Burton got their first taste of Indian warfare in a cavalry charge. Infantry commander Jabez Nowlan had a large nose. Fellow legionnaire Abner Blackburn recalled. Nowlan's wife told him that if he were shot it would be in his nose. Sure enough, he was.

The militia lost one man but killed a dozen of the seventy or eighty Utes who fought in the battle. Wells captured seventeen warriors near Spanish Fork and executed them on the ice of Utah Lake. The Mormons took the surviving women and children to Salt Lake City, where most of them died, not being able to adapt to the whites' way of living. Ute tribal lore claims that every year, Old Bishop appears on the bank of the Provo River and one by one takes the rocks out of his stomach and throws them into the river, then disappears.

Wasatch County Veterans List
Battle Creek War
Pleasant Grove, Utah
Ute Indians vs. Caucasian Pioneers
1859

Murdock, Joseph Stacy
~~Rockwell, Orrin Porter~~